

**WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

1. A method comprising:  
receiving a request from a parent or guardian of a minor to sign up for an Instant Messaging (IM) service on behalf of the minor;  
providing a Web-based profile administrator interface to the parent or guardian;  
receiving a profile, created by the parent or guardian using the Web-based profile administrator interface, that comprises one or more control policies for usage of the IM service by the minor;  
receiving a request from the minor to log on to the IM service using a client device; and  
communicating information from the profile to the client device to modify the functionality of the client device to comply with at least one policy in the profile.
2. The method of claim 1 further comprising:  
using a policy engine of the client device to limit usage of the IM service to the minor based on the at least one policy.
3. The method of claim 2 wherein the policy engine comprises a plug-in for an instant messaging client.
4. The method of claim 1 further comprising:  
using a policy engine of the client device to inhibit usage of the IM service to the minor based on the at least one policy.
5. The method of claim 4 wherein the policy engine comprises a plug-in for an instant messaging client.

6. The method of claim 1 further comprising:  
using a policy engine of the client device to allow usage of the IM service to the  
minor based on the at least one policy.

7. The method of claim 6 wherein the policy engine comprises a plug-in for an  
instant messaging client.

8. The method of claim 1 wherein the at least one policy indicates specific times  
when messages from members of a buddy list for the minor are to be blocked or allowed.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein the at least one policy indicates specific times  
when messages from anyone not in a buddy list for the minor are to be blocked or  
allowed.

10. The method of claim 1 further comprising:  
periodically receiving from the client device a log of actions taken by the client  
device to comply with the at least one policy.

11. A system comprising:

a first server to receive a request from a parent or guardian of a minor to sign up  
for an Instant Messaging (IM) service on behalf of the minor, to provide a  
Web-based profile administrator interface to the parent or guardian, and to  
receive a profile, created by the parent or guardian using the Web-based  
profile administrator interface, that comprises one or more control policies  
for usage of the IM service by the minor; and  
a second server to receive a request from the minor to log on to the IM service  
using a client device, and to communicate information from the profile to  
the client device to modify the functionality of the client device to comply  
with at least one policy in the profile.

12. The system of claim 11 wherein the client device comprises a policy engine to limit usage of the IM service to the minor based on the at least one policy.

13. The system of claim 12 wherein the policy engine comprises a plug-in for an instant messaging client.

14. The system of claim 11 wherein the client device comprises a policy engine to inhibit usage of the IM service to the minor based on the at least one policy.

15. The system of claim 14 wherein the policy engine comprises a plug-in for an instant messaging client.

16. The system of claim 11 wherein the client device comprises a policy engine to allow usage of the IM service to the minor based on the at least one policy.

17. The system of claim 16 wherein the policy engine comprises a plug-in for an instant messaging client.

18. The system of claim 11 wherein the at least one policy indicates specific times when messages from members of a buddy list for the minor are to be blocked or allowed.

19. The system of claim 11 wherein the at least one policy indicates specific times when messages from anyone not in a buddy list for the minor are to be blocked or allowed.

20. The system of claim 11 wherein the second server is to periodically receive from the client device a log of actions taken by the client device to comply with the at least one policy.